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# INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in teaching foreign languages to children has created a demand for studies which attempt to find answers which could justify an early start in language learning. Typically, the questions which are under scrutiny are those which highlight the differences in second language acquisition between adults and children, effective teaching procedures and techniques or the language achievement of different age groups. One of the important areas of child language development which has not been widely researched is vocabulary acquisition. Children's lexical growth and the processes involved in learning vocabulary are the area with which this dissertation is concerned. It attempts to answer the questions: **how well young learners remember lexical material, which words are easier to retrieve, how recall and recognition test results differ and which learner characteristics influence successful retrieval.** The study has been conducted by means of two research projects, qualitative and quantitative, which followed a quasi-experimental design of pre-test/post-test.

The book can be conveniently divided into two parts. Part one is theoretical and offers a review of the psychological, linguistic and methodological factors which underlie second language learning in children. Part two is empirical and describes research on vocabulary recognition and recall in children aged 7 and 8.

The theoretical part of this study aims at presenting a broader context for children's foreign language acquisition by discussing issues in human learning, child development and first language acquisition. Chapter 1 explores selected issues in human learning. It concentrates on the role of intelligence and memory in learning processes, discusses individual cognitive and learning styles and shows the function of perception in learning. The next chapter focuses on the field of child development. Providing a historical background for child studies, it reviews developmental theories and concentrates on the characteristics of lower primary children. The following chapter narrows down the discussion about child development to first

language acquisition by analysing the growth of mother tongue from the point of view of the mental processes which take place while the language subsystems of lexis, syntax and phonology are developing. Special attention is given to the representation of vocabulary knowledge in the mind i.e. the mental lexicon. Chapter 4 focuses on second language acquisition. Apart from a review of a number of influential SLA theories it discusses the influence of different factors, such as age or motivation, on second language learning. It also contains comparisons of first and second language acquisition processes. The last chapter of part one concentrates on vocabulary learning and teaching vocabulary to adult and young learners of English.

The second part of the book is concerned with the research. First, in Chapter 6, it provides an overview of the procedures used in educational research currently available for projects carried out with children. It touches upon a number of crucial problems such as research intervention, administration procedures or ethical problems, which are a particularly sensitive area in projects with young learners. The remaining chapters of part two are empirical and focus on the memory processes which are involved in vocabulary learning and remembering. Vocabulary learning was considered particularly interesting in children's SLA because it constitutes the core of their language learning. It is the area where they progress more quickly than in grammar or skills development, and it is a field of tangible achievement. This thesis aims at determining the factors which influence vocabulary learning and the ability to recall and recognise words. The empirical part of the dissertation includes Chapter 7, which briefly introduces the general assumptions of the research project, and Chapters 8 and 9, which describe the qualitative and quantitative projects respectively. Both projects aim to investigate children's vocabulary recognition and recall.

The book is by no means exhaustive. The question of children's lexical achievement in the foreign language classroom is a vast area of study. It can be viewed from many different perspectives and deserves in-depth studies on a larger scale than may be suggested by this publication. The work examines only the oral acquisition of lexis, which might be taken as a starting point for further investigations into the comparison of oral and written representations of words as a source of lexical knowledge. There are also numerous other areas to consider as there is little to date published in the field of foreign language lexical achievement in the lower primary classroom.